

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 07573 122209Z

ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 FEA-01 /075 W

-----005053 122220Z /64

P R 122125Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3200

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

USSOUTHCOM

AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA

AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE BOGOTA 7573

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, ECON, CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. IN PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS, ALL IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY NOW APPEAR TO HAVE UNTIED BEHIND THE CANDIDACY OF BELISARIO BETANCUR AND THE FOUR LIBERAL PARTY PRE-CANDIDATES MET PRIVATELY TO CLARIFY THE PROVESS FOR DETERMINING THEIR PARTY'S NOMINEE. THE DEMOCRATIC LABOR CENTRALS CONSIDERED CALLING A 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE TO PROTEST THE EFFECTS OF HIGH INFLATION, BUT THEY WOULD PROBABLY PREFER TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT IF THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD MAKE SOME GESTURE SYMPATHETIC TO THEIR POSITION. PRESIDENT LOPEZ INAUGURATED OPERATION OF THE NEW TEXACO ECOPETROL GAS PIPELING. A LARGE NUMBER OF CONGRESSMEN SIGNED A DECLARATION SUPPORTING "TOTAL INDEPENDENCE" FOR PUERTO RICO. END SUMMARY.

2. INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION BEGINS TO CLARIFY. THE FOUR LIBERAL PARTY PRE-CANDIDATES ARE HOLDING THEIR SECOND SUMMIT

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 07573 122209Z

MEETING AUGUST 12, SURROUNDED BY SECRECY, TO CLARIFY POINTS IN THE SAN CARLOS AGREEMENT WHICH ESTABLISHES THE PROCEDURE FOR CHOOSING THE CANDIDATE. THE MAJOR CONTROVERSY CENTERS ON WHETHER AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OR MERELY A PLURALITY WILL BE REQUIRED. EFFORTS TO ARRANGE THIS MEETING WERE ASSISTED BY TWO EVENTS DURING THE WEEK. FIRST, A HIGHLY PUBLICIZED PRIVATE MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS ON AUGUST 5 APPEARS

TO HAVE SPURRED LLERAS TO PUSH HARD FOR THIS SUMMIT MEETING. THEN, AN EDITORIAL BY THE INFLUENTIAL LIBERAL DAILY, EL TIEMPO, INDICATED THIS PAPER WOULD NAME ITS PRESIDENTIAL CHOICE ON AUGUST 14. IT IS WIDELY ASSUMED THAT EL TIEMPO WILL COME OUT IN SUPPORT OF CARLOS LLERAS. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ALSO MOVED CLOSER TO UNITY THIS WEEK AS TWO GROUPS GENERALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE OSPINA FACTION PUBLICLY ENDORSED BELISARIO BETANCUR AS THE PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. ALL FACTIONS OF THE PARTY NOW OPENLY SUPPORT THE ONE CANDIDATE. BETANCUR, IN ACCEPTING THESE ENDORSEMENTS, CONTINUED TO MAINTAIN HIS STANCE THAT THE PARTY'S NATIONAL CONVENTION SHOULD SELECT THE CANDIDATE, AND THAT COLOMBIA NEEDS A "NATIONAL COALITION" CANDIDATE, AN APPARENT BID FOR LIBERAL VOTER SUPPORT. MEANWHILE, LEFT-WING POLITICAL GROUPS CONTINUED TO SPLIT INTO DIFFERENT IDEOLOGICAL FACTIONS. THE COMMUNIST PARTY, IN ALLIANCE WITH PART OF ANAPO AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY, SELECTED ANAPO LEADER JULIO C. PERINIA AS THEIR CANDIDATE AT A WELL ATTENDED MASS RALLY AUGUST 6 IN BOGOTA. THE ANAPO SOCIALISTS, SUPPORTED BY THE MOIST MOIR AND OTHER EXTREMIST GROUPS, HAD PREVIOUSLY NAMED JAIME PIEDRAHITA CARDONA, ALSO OF ANAPO, AS THEIR CANDIDATE. LATER THIS WEEK, A SMALL GROUP OF TROTSKYITES ANNOUNCED THEY WILL SPONSOR THE WOMAN PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL TEACHERS FEDERATION, SOCORRO RAMIREZ, AS THEIR PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL.

3. DEMOCRATIC UNIONS SUPPORT GENERAL STRIKE POSSIBILITY. THE NATION'S TWO DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNION CONFEDERATIONS, THE UTC AND CTC, MOVED CLOSER THIS WEEK TO OFFICIAL SUPPORT OF A NATIONWIDE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BOGOTA 07573 122209Z

24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE TO PROTEST THE INCREASING COST OF LIVING. UPSET OVER PRESIDENT LOPEZ' LETTER REJECTING THEIR PETITIONS FOR RELIEF FROM INFLATION AND THE PATERNALISTIC TONE OF HIS REPLY, BOTH UNIONS HELD EMERGENCY EXECUTIVE MEETINGS TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF A STRIKE. THEY DECIDED TO FURTHER PRESENT THEIR CASES TO THE PRESIDENT AND NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS ARE SCHEDULED FOR NEXT WEEK TO CONSIDER THE PRESIDENT'S EXPECTED RESPONSE. FINAL DECISIONS ON THE GENERAL STRIKE ISSUE ARE EXPECTED AT THAT TIME. ACCORDING TO UNION SOURCES, BOTH GROUPS WOULD PREFER TO OPEN A PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE PRESIDENT ON THE INFLATION PROBLEM, AND THUS AVOID SUPPORTING DEMONSTRATIONS ADVOCATED BY LEFT-WING UNIONS WHICH MIGHT GET OUT OF CONTROL AND BRING ABOUT A CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT, UNWANTED BY THE UTC AND CTC. THEY NOTE THAT RANK AND FILE PRESSURES OVER INFLATION HAVE EASED WITH THE REDUCED MONTHLY INFLATION FIGURES (BOGOTA 7291), AND UNION LEADERS ARE UNCERTAIN AS TO HOW MUCH SUPPORT A GENERAL STRIKE MIGHT GENERATE.

4. PRESIDENT INAUGURATES GUAJIRA GAS PIPELINE. PRESIDENT LOPEZ INAUGURATED OPERATION OF THE TEXACO ECOPETROL GAS PIPELINE IN THE GUAJIRA ON AUGUST 12. THE PIPELINE WILL CARRY 120 MILLION CUBIC FEET A DAY OF GAS TO BARRANQUILLA AND CARTAGENA WHERE IT

WILL SUBSTITUTE FOR FUEL OIL ELECTRICITY GENERATION AND MEET THE EXCESS RESIDENTIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEMAND. THE REMAINING 300 MILLION CUBIC FEET POTENTIAL FLOW IS EARMARKED FOR AMONIA/UREA AND LNG PROJECTS WHICH ARE BEING ACTIVELY PROMOTED BY THE GOC.

5. COLOMBIAN CONGRESSMEN EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR PUERTO RICAN INDEPENDENCE. IN A STATEMENT RELEASED TO THE PRESS ON AUGUST 8, SOME 100 COLOMBIAN SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT OF THE "STRUGGLE OF THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE FOR THEIR TOTAL INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY AND THE RECOGNITION OF THEIR RIGHT TO NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION." COMMENT: THE STATEMENT, WHICH RECEIVED LITTLE MEDIA ATTENTION AND WHICH APPEARS TO BE OF MINOR SIGNIFICANCE HERE, IS NOT TOTALLY INCONSISTENT WITH BASIC U.S. POLICY. ITS ISSUANCE, HOWEVER, MAY INDICATE SOME MISUNDER- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 BOGOTA 07573 122209Z

STANDING OF THAT POLICY THE DECLARATION'S ADHERENTS. THE EMBASSY IS SENDING MATERIAL EXPLAINING U.S. POLICY ON PUERTO RICO TO CERTAIN OF THESE CONGRESSMEN.
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